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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000253

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/6/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [LE](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON CRISIS: REQUEST FOR HIGH-LEVEL CALL TO HOLY SEE

REF: (A) STATE 193090 (B) Larrea-Sandrolini emails (C) VATICAN 239 (D) VATICAN
197 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'Affaires, EXEC,
State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

SEE ACTION REQUEST IN PARA 9.

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary. The Holy See is struggling to determine the best course of action in Lebanon, and we may be able to tip the balance if we act promptly. Deputy FM-equivalent Parolin and the papal nuncio in Washington seem ready to raise the level of the Vatican's role in bringing the Lebanese Christian community together, thus helping to preserve both the community and the state itself. Parolin believes the US should engage Syria as a sine qua non for a settlement in Lebanon, and also thinks the Siniora government and its international supporters erred tactically in pressing too hard on the Hariri investigation. Embassy recommends a prompt high-level call from Department to FM Mamberti. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (S) Charge d'Affaires and poloff delivered Lebanon points (refs a and b) on December 6 to Monsignor Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Under Secretary for Relations with States (equivalent to deputy foreign minister) and pressed for ideas on how to address the growing crisis in Lebanon. Charge particularly stressed the urgency of the situation; the need to bolster the Siniora government and oppose Syrian machinations; Aoun's cynical maneuvers; Lahoud's overdue departure; the danger to the Christian population in Lebanon; and the roles of the Holy See, Patriarch Sfeir, and the USG.

LEBANON AT CRITICAL POINT

[¶3.](#) (S) Parolin readily agreed that Lebanon was at a "critical point", going as far as to say that its very existence was at stake. He agreed that the divisions in the Christian community were troubling and damaging to the community's own interests. "[The lay Christian leaders] are looking out for their personal interests and not those of the community," he said, "but in fact are hurting everyone." Parolin conceded that the Patriarch's advanced years may have rendered him unable to take the strong role needed to rally Christian leaders to productive positions.

14. (S) Charge urged that the Holy See and the papal nuncio in Beirut (Archbishop Luigi Gatti) play a more visible role in supporting Siniora and encouraging Lahoud's departure. Parolin let the reference to Gatti pass, but clearly understood that more leadership was needed. (Note: Parolin was aware of last week's meeting between Ambassador Rooney and Washington nuncio Sambti -- ref b -- but apparently has not yet received a readout. Sambti told us he would press Rome on Gatti, who has been ineffective despite having more than two decades of experience with Lebanon. End note.)

WHAT NEXT?

15. (S) According to Parolin, the Holy See understands that something needs to be done with Christian leaders (including Aoun, who it sees as manipulated by Hizballah), and the Vatican is perhaps the only entity in a position to do it. At our prompting, Parolin said the Vatican is considering a number of options -- such as sending a papal envoy sent to meet with the patriarch, nuncio and lay Christian leaders -- but nothing has been decided. He added that he could not say more at this time, adding that it would be important to see the results of the December 6 meeting of Maronite bishops before acting further.

16. (S) Parolin observed that the Holy See is hesitant to get too involved in Lebanon, conscious of the tendency of Christians there to look for outside intervention to resolve their differences, instead of organizing themselves. In this case, however, the situation was too grave to stand by and do nothing. The first step would likely be an appeal from the pope -- something he would commonly weave into his weekly address Wednesday or Sunday. The pope dedicated his December 6 address to Turkey, but included a coda about Lebanon: "in the face of

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the dark forces that are trying to destroy the country, I call on all Lebanese not to allow themselves to be conquered by hatred, but to reinforce national unity, justice, and reconciliation, and to work together to build a future of peace. I call on the leaders of countries who have at heart the destiny of that region to contribute to a global and negotiated solution of the various situations of injustice that have marked it for too many years."

HOLY SEE RECOMMENDATIONS

17. (S) Parolin raised two points of difference with our approach in Lebanon. Acknowledging USG suspicions of Syrian behavior, he nevertheless urged that the USG talk to Damascus and find a way to engage the Syrians in any negotiation on Lebanon. "If you don't involve them, they are going to be a continuing problem there," he insisted. Parolin agreed completely that the Tribunal must move forward on investigating the Hariri murder, but cautioned that it be done more prudently. He felt that the Siniora government -- and its international supporters -- had erred in pushing too hard too soon, thus provoking Hizballah and weakening the government. With regard to the extent of U.S. contacts with lay Christian leaders in Lebanon, Parolin encouraged the USG to push them to abandon their

self-destructive behavior.

COMMENT

18. (S) The normally reticent Holy See is struggling to determine the best course of action in Lebanon. Parolin is passionate about the country, and we judge that both he and Archbishop Sambri (in Washington) are pressing for a strong stand but face internal opposition. (For example, Parolin's views appear startlingly different from those of his deputy for Lebanon; we will report further on this). The Holy See doesn't lack for skeptics concerning the USG's recent history in the region -- above all in Iraq, but also in moving too slowly to seek a ceasefire in Lebanon this summer. Nevertheless, our contacts also understand that both we and they have a critical role there. A focus on giving priority to the interests of Lebanon -- and its multi-faith democracy -- could persuade the Holy See to act more boldly to bring errant Christian leaders together and speed the departure of Lahoud.

19. (S) ACTION REQUEST. We may be able to tip the balance. We recommend a prompt call from Washington at the highest level possible to Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Holy See's new Secretary for Relations with States (i.e. foreign minister), to

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urge decisive action by the Holy See and its representatives in Lebanon.

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